

Trails Booklet, Text material

This is all the text material from the May 2006 issue, although some of the articles were unchanged from the previous printing.

Westford Trails
The East Boston Camps Issue
June 2005

What a thrill that Westford has been able to purchase East Boston Camps after many years of wishing. This is a large woodland area, with Burge's Pond in the center, many trails, many eskers, and an especially lovely trail meandering along Stony Brook. This issue of Westford Trails is dedicated to East Boston Camps and our good fortune at having preserved it for ourselves and for future generations.

There have also been a number of other recent trail improvements and open space preservations. Perhaps the most impressive is a boardwalk over Boutwell Brook in the area where a huge beaver dam had blocked the Tom Paul Trail. This long boardwalk was initiated by Eagle Scout Devin Sears, who coordinated the contributions of many other Boy Scouts. Another Eagle Scout trail project was done by Paul Berard, consisting of a new trail bridge and other improvements connecting the Peace Trail with Drews Crossing. To facilitate safe walking down the steep embankment alongside the Stone Arch Bridge, Eagle Scout Neal Dixon arranged for steps to be constructed down the steep slope. Also this spring Eagle Scout Steve Edwards led an energetic group on a trail improvement project in the Frances Hill Wildlife Sanctuary. They installed an attractive sign at the trailhead on Lowell Road, built two trail bridges over streams, and also marked the property lines of the land.

The Conservation Commission, which has been regularly talking with landowners about possible land acquisitions by the Town, succeeded recently in acquiring 11 acres along Stony Brook, immediately downstream from the bridge on Stony Brook Road. Also the Commission purchased a 1.3 acre area of woodland that expands the land known as the Cider Mill Pond conservation land. Near the Chelmsford line, the Westford Conservation Trust acquired a conservation restriction which expands the Frances Hill Wildlife Sanctuary by 5 acres. Finally, the Conservation Commission acquired 2 additional acres of woodland in the vicinity of the Emmet Conservation Land.

A new trailhead parking lot was constructed as a part of the "Trailside" subdivision. New residents in that area are fortunate to abut a large woodland consisting of the Emmet Conservation Land, the Wilson conservation land (owned by the Westford Conservation Trust), and the Audubon sanctuary. Particularly around Nashoba Pond, this conservation land is noted for abundant wildlife, and is the location of the spring bird walk every year.

The new Stony Brook School is now completed, and as a result many children can walk or bicycle to and from school on the abutting rail trail. This is the Mass Electric

Line, which was a trolley line many years ago, has become an attractive level trail. It begins in Graniteville, passes next to the new school, and extends all the way to Nabnasset. At the Day School, the Living Lab project has expanded to include a sturdy boardwalk leading to the edge of Reed Brook. The fortunate students have Reed Brook on one side and the John Gagnon nature trail on the other. A woodland trail now connects the Day School with Orchard Street in Forge Village, although trail hikers must pass over the top of Kissacook Hill to go between these two points (see trail map on page xx).

Concept. The concept of the Westford Trails System is to include all of the town rather than just one or two major open space areas. Ideally these trails will be accessible from all of the residences throughout the town, providing links with the major open space areas and with other trails. The permanently preserved trails are located on land owned by the town, land owned by the Westford Conservation Trust, land owned by Mass Audubon, and connecting trail easements. In addition, the state's rails-to-trails project, "The Bruce Freeman Trail," near Route 27 will constitute a valuable connection and a beautiful trail in its own right. This is being incorporated into the Bay Circuit Trail, which is a long distance trail, extending from Ipswich on the North Shore to Duxbury on the South Shore.

Trail Length. The appropriate length of a trail varies considerably for different trail uses. For walking a dog, recuperating from an illness, or other short walks, a trail of less than a mile, preferably in a loop, is best. Among the longest distance trail users are horseback riders, who often cover 5 to 20 miles in one ride. In between, cross-country skiers typically travel about 2 to 5 miles. For walking to and from school, both long and short trails are useful to accommodate different neighborhoods. An ideal trail system should have numerous branches and loops in addition to the main arteries.

The Tom Paul Trail. This trail route from Westford Center to the Stone Arch Bridge, now called "The Tom Paul Trail," is illustrated in two of the maps that follow. Along with an overview map of the whole route, a more detailed map shows the portion between Town Hall and Evergreen Circle. A description is also given of the trail and some of the interesting sights along the way.

The Future. The trail system is becoming better and better. Trail easements that now exist together with the town-owned and Trust-owned open spaces provide a substantial network of trails for passive recreation. New trails have been added in every year, and more are expected. These additional links will provide alternate routes, additional access points, and a greater number of loops so that we can leave and return by different paths. It will also increase opportunities for children to walk to and from school, and provide more variety in where we can walk.

For more information about the Westford Conservation Trust, see our web pages: <http://www.westfordconservationtrust.org/>, or contact president Marian Harman at 10 Chamberlin Rd., 692-3907. Alternatively you can send EMail to MarianHarman@AOL.com. For more information about the Westford Conservation

Commission, see the web pages: <http://westford.mec.edu/govt/conserv/cc.html>, or contact agent Bill Turner at Town Hall, 692-5524. A simpler route is to begin at the Westford page, <http://www.westford.com/> which leads to both sites.

East Boston Camps

Marian Harman, August 2005

Fall is the perfect time to take a walk at East Boston Camps, if you haven't already discovered Westford's most recent open space acquisition. "The Camps" were purchased by an enthusiastic and unanimous town meeting vote in the spring of this year.

This 286 acre parcel of land is, essentially, a peninsula, bordered on the west by Stony Brook, and on the east by Keyes Brook. In the middle of the land is the clear and lovely Burge's Pond. Because of these water resources, East Boston Camps contains extensive and varied wildlife habitats. The land itself is comprised largely of glacial deposits of sand and gravel in the form of long, high, steep-sided eskers. The brooks are host to many migratory species of birds in spring and fall, some of which nest here, such as mergansers, pintails, ring-necked and wood ducks. The woods are full of migratory song birds such as various warbler species, scarlet tanagers, orioles and thrushes. Many resident birds such as barred, screech and great horned owl nest here too. Wildflowers, both common and uncommon, line the banks of Stony Brook. Mammals, such as red fox, white-tailed deer, mink, otter and fisher pass through. There are a bog and several vernal pools on the property.

An extensive trail system links these habitat areas with the camp buildings themselves. Except when camp is in session, July and August, the trails are open to the public for non-motorized uses. During camp season, only the trail along Stony Brook is open to walkers.

Enter East Boston Camps at Depot St., across from Stoney Brook Acres farm stand at the Depot St. bridge near Lowell Rd. Drive in the long dirt road and park in the public parking area inside the open metal gate. Take a moment to read the rules and regulations for the property which are posted there. Then, with this map as a guide, start your exploration. To see photos of the property and for more information on East Boston Camps, its history and plans for its future, see the Town's excellent new website at www.ebcwestford.net.

The Tom Paul Trail — Main Street to the Stone Arch Bridge

Marian Harman

Spring weather seems to call us to the outdoors. We want to exercise our logy bodies, smell the warm earth, and gladden our hearts with the sight of newly unfolding wildflowers and the sounds of returning migrant birds. But where to walk? The

Westford Conservation Trust has been working for 15 years to preserve some of Westford's most beautiful open spaces and trails. These lands and trails are open to the public and are maintained for the benefit of Westford's inhabitants for passive recreation such as hiking, horseback riding, and cross-country skiing.

The C. Thomas Paul trail, named in honor of the Trust's President from 1989 to 1995, now a Connecticut resident, was marked and maintained for years by Tom and his children.

The Tom Paul trail is one of the longest and most interesting trails in town, beginning at the center, and extending all the way to the Stone Arch Bridge in Graniteville. The trail starts from Main Street directly across from Town Hall, between a stone wall and the driveway at 56 Main St. Look for yellow painted blazes to guide you. The trail from Town Hall to Pine Ridge Rd. is about 2 miles long, beyond which the trail extends another 3/4 mile through Town land to the Stone Arch Bridge. Much of the beautiful woodland through which the trail passes is permanently preserved open space belonging to Blanchard Farms, one of Westford's most beautiful condominium developments. Please keep to the defined trail which is a limit of the trail easement. The trail is hilly and at some spots, wet.

The beginning part of the trail is a riot of wildflowers in the spring: Celandine, Wild Geranium, and Dame's Rocket are but a few. As you make your way downhill, you will notice that you are passing between two stone walls which define an old colonial farm road. Leaving the old road, another turn downhill will take you to one of the most beautiful areas of this trail. You will notice that the vegetation changes here to one of large pines and oaks, and especially Yellow Birch. The Yellow Birch is an unusual tree for Westford; notice its curly bark. Cross over a small stream on a footbridge, and if you are visiting in the month of May, you will be rewarded by the sight of a carpet of Pink Lady's Slippers. This area of the trail is privately owned, so please respect the landowner's generosity, and be careful not to disturb any vegetation.

The trail proceeds past a small pond still within Blanchard Farms, crosses Blanchard Rd., passes over a small earthen footbridge, proceeds uphill, in an area of very large rocks, and continues to Graniteville Rd. To your right is the old Bixby homestead. David Bixby was a revolutionary war hero. The home's owner after 1940 was Walter Blanchard, a W.W.I veteran and milk dealer.

Cross Graniteville Rd. with a jog to the left of about 50 ft., and enter the trail again. This section of trail begins between two stone walls. A vernal pool (a pool which is wet only seasonally and which is utilized for breeding by several rare species of amphibians) forms in this area at times. Beyond the last house on Ledgewood Dr., the trail passes through a gap in an old stone wall, into a woodland, turns left along the wall, passes another vernal pool and crosses two streams. You will then find that you are entering another interesting old colonial road, defined by a pair of stone walls. Here the old road goes in both directions. To the left leads to Forge Village Rd. The route to the Stone Arch Bridge proceeds to the right. The road crosses an old colonial stone bridge over a brook, comes to an intersection and proceeds left along another old roadway bounded by a pair of stone walls.

The Tom Paul Trail

(continuation)

The original Tom Paul trail turns left at this point, but beavers have built a huge dam across Boutwell Brook right where the trail crosses. You have two choices. If you continue straight (north), you can follow a new trail, which was constructed this year to circumvent the beaver dam. It's a beautiful walk, and leads to Cold Spring Road, at which point you will follow the road to the left (west), returning to the main trail after you cross Pine Ridge Road. A sign marks the place where the trail leaves Cold Spring Road.

Alternatively, you can follow the original route and cross Boutwell Brook using the beaver dam. This is easiest in the fall when the water is low, but still possible for people with good balance and good boots in the spring. In any case, the beaver dam is interesting to see. Before reaching the beaver dam, you will be on another historical road outlined by two stone walls. This road is shown on the 1730 Westford map, connecting what we now know as Coldspring Rd. with Graniteville Rd. The foundation of the old Paul Fletcher home is located here. Fletcher was a Westford farmer, tax collector and road surveyor in 1728.

After the beaver dam, the trail proceeds to Evergreen Circle. Keep the pond on your right, and walk straight across the cul-de-sac. The trail proceeds down the left-hand side of Evergreen Circle, though you may also walk along the paved surface.

Beyond this point the trail proceeds across Pine Ridge Rd., straight through the Town Forest. It is not marked, but it is very easy to see your way straight through to Coldspring Rd. Cross Coldspring and continue straight through the pines to the old railroad bed, keeping the former town landfill on your right. Look for bluebird nesting boxes in this area on the right. Bluebirds have consistently been sighted at these boxes. This trail leads straight to the Stone Arch Bridge. This railroad bridge, built in 1872, entirely of granite blocks without mortar, is best seen from the bottom, standing next to Stony Brook, but the trail down is very steep! Another new trail has been laid out just beyond the Stone Arch Bridge, which is described on a later page. Also, from the far side is a more gradual marked path leading down to the good viewing area.

On your way to the bridge, you will probably notice the Russell Bird Sanctuary trail on your left. A lovely perimeter trail allows you to walk around the sanctuary. This area is well worth a visit either before or after you see the bridge. Happy Trails!

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Stone Arch Bridge Trail

Peggy Bennett

Inner peace is often found along the water's edge or in the aromatic woodland. This scenic oasis will surely fill up your senses whether you're looking for quiet reflection or a good power walk.

The Westford Conservation Commission recently acquired 7 woodland acres from the B & M Railroad just north of the Stone Arch Bridge. Accessed from Coldspring Road by the "Trail to Stone Arch Bridge" sign, follow the tall pines to the old railroad bed keeping the former town landfill on your right. Continue to the Stone Arch Bridge, and about 70 paces beyond, you'll see a sign on your right. Make a hard right down the gully walking back towards the bridge. Enjoy the spectacular view of the colorful marsh and listen to Stony Brook gently trickling over the beaver dam. This scene is framed by the arch on the underside of the bridge like a fine work of art. Backtrack through the gully upwards toward the trail sign and follow the yellow blazes to your right which will lead you on a pine needle trail along the picturesque brook.

The chattering Kingfisher and whistling Broad-winged Hawk seem to welcome you to their homestead. A family of Mallard Ducks fish for dinner as a Great Blue Heron flies overhead disappearing into the wooded edge. For a remarkable view of the slow-moving water, there is a natural granite bench decorated with patches of lichen. There's a southern feel to this spot as the Red Maple drapes its branches overhead reaching down toward the water encompassing you in its gentle grip.

The trail continues downstream along the water for a bit, then heads up through the woods past stone walls and White Birch trees. Meanwhile, the brook plays hide-and-go-seek with many vistas. As you ascend, you get an aerial view. Notice the 4-ft. rectangular stone marker. Perhaps Stonehenge is missing a piece. The trail makes a hairpin turn to the left at this point, returning along a different path away from the brook. The trail now descends a bit, leading you through a grassy hollow suitable for a doe and her fawn to hunker down for the night.

It is easy walking and well marked with yellow blazes, ending at an old bridge abutment with the RR tracks on your right. Making a left here will lead you back to the main entrance.

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Mystery Spring/Tadmuck Swamp Area

Jeff Dierks

Tadmuck Swamp is one of Westford's largest wetlands, stretching from Main Street on the north to south of Littleton Road (Rt. 110), and from Tadmuck Road on the west to Chamberlain Road on the east. The area features Mystery Spring, which has been a favorite local "watering hole" for over 150 years, attractive woodlands, and fascinating glacial terrain. All these natural features are readily accessible thanks to a trail network which you can enter from Tadmuck Road, Dana Drive, or Buckboard Drive, as shown on the accompanying map.

Mystery Spring Trail (0.2 miles long) starts at Tadmuck Road immediately north of the Interstate 495 bridge. A large wooden sign, installed in April 2002, marks the entrance to the property. Avoiding the poison ivy near the entrance, take a left turn almost right away, then follow the trail which is outlined by logs and marked by white blazes on trees. One-tenth of a mile from the road, the Flaherty Trail leaves left for Dana Drive. After another one-tenth mile, the Mystery Spring Trail ends at the spring, which was called “Mysterious Spring” on the 1855 Town Map prepared by Edward Symmes. Emerging from a cleft in a rock, these waters would once have been a refreshing delight to people and animals alike, but please do not consume them today. Perhaps you will see one of the spring’s resident frogs, which tarry at the spring’s mouth at certain times of year. The spring and nearby lands to the south were bequeathed to the Town by Oscar Spaulding in 1943.

The **Flaherty Trail** (0.3 miles long) runs from the Mystery Spring Trail to the Dana Drive cul-de-sac. The trail features pleasant woodlands, old stone walls, and a secluded pond. Ponder this water body’s origin as you make your way around it on a side path. Be prepared for a muddy area along the trail near Dana Drive. This trail was constructed in 2001 by Joe Flaherty, developer of nearby Orion Way, and was named by the Westford Conservation Trust in his honor. Mr. Flaherty was the 2001 recipient of the Conservation Trustee Award, because of his accomplishments of preserving environmentally-sensitive areas and open space in his developments.

The **Tadmuck Divide Trail** (0.5 miles long) provides a delightful scramble over glaciated terrain, fun for children and nimble adults alike. The sinuous ridge over which you walk may be an “esker”, the remains of the gravel bed of a stream that once ran over (or in) the glacier that covered our area more than 10,000 years ago. The rounded cobbles and boulders of the ancient streambed are evident in the footpath. The trail extends from the Dana Drive cul-de-sac, to a point on the Old Haul Road near Buckboard Drive. There is one muddy area near Buckboard Drive. North of the trail, precipitation drains to Tadmuck Brook, which conveys water north to Stony Brook. South of the trail, precipitation drains to Beaver Brook, which flows south then east through Chelmsford Center, discharging eventually into River Meadow Brook and the Concord River. From the trail’s high point atop the esker, there is a surprising solitude, as the forest screens the sight and sound of nearby human habitation. Unmarked paths lead over branching eskers from the trail’s high point – take time to explore other parts of the glacier’s gift!

The **Old Haul Road** (0.5 miles long) was once part of a gravel road network providing access between Tadmuck Road and Chamberlain Road. Gravel roads in the general area appear on all six editions of the U.S. Geological Survey topographic maps of Westford published from 1941 to 1987, servicing sand and gravel pits that once operated here. No longer intended for vehicles, the road now provides a wide, easy walk between Buckboard Drive and Dana Drive. From Buckboard Drive, the old road begins between houses nos. 37 and 39; shortly before some big boulders blocking vehicular access, the Tadmuck Divide Trail leaves left into the woods behind a stone wall. The Old Haul Road crosses Dana Drive and extends a short distance up the hill to Tadmuck Road, where the old road’s entrance is still visible.

Slifer Conservation Land

John Piekos

In 1987, the town acquired the Slifer property and made most of the property conservation land. The Slifer property was once a thriving, wonderfully landscaped

property. Over the years, much of the landscaping has become overgrown. However the property still features a variety of flowers, roses, and ornamental trees in addition to two sets of unbelievably huge, must-see, rhododendrons. (Late May or early June is the best time to see the rhododendrons in full bloom.) This property also features an abundance of wildlife, from a variety of birds to local Canadian geese, beavers and otters.

In 1998 the property received a major face-lift from Will Bunker, an aspiring Eagle Scout. Will and a group of volunteers cleaned up the property and installed three picnic tables. Also in 1998, a group of volunteers from the Westford Land Stewardship Committee, a joint committee from the Conservation Commission and the Westford Conservation Trust, cleared a trail through the upland wooded portion of the property. This trail is wide and nicely marked. It passes close by a group of about five huge rhododendrons which reside in the middle of the woods. The trail entrance is located at the parking area and exists in a clearing where you will find a picnic table nestled along side several ornamental trees. The trail can be extended by walking past a small pond along the way to Keyes pond and looping back toward the parking area. The total time to walk this "figure eight" path is about 15 minutes, though it may take you double that if you pause to admire the beautiful flora and fauna along the way!

The Slifer property is located at the corner of Keyes Road and Gould Road (just around the corner from the Picking/Gould Farm). The entrance to the property is located on Keyes Road and is marked by three mortared stone pillars.

- Map Legend -

- 1 - Parking area. Bounded by two gigantic rhododendrons
- 2 - In the middle of the forest are five large rhododendrons.
- 3 - Three picnic tables are placed strategically on the property.
- 4 - Tree with hole in trunk. Look through it!
- 5 - Raspberry patch.
- 6 - Pump house.
- 7 - Boat house.
- 8 - Hopefully the dock location, someday.
- 9 - Bridge over stream (private property).
- 10 - Gazebo (private property)
- 11 - Former Slifer house (now private residence)

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"John Gagnon Nature Trail" — Kissacook Hill

David Coleman

Many of us think that in order to experience the "Great Outdoors" we have to load-up the wagon and head for the hills. It is always a pleasant surprise to find a bit of paradise in our own little corner of the planet. Such is the case with the John Gagnon / White Birch trail to the top of Kissacook Hill.

The U.S. Geological Survey's topographic map of Westford (1978) shows the top of Kissacook Hill to be at an elevation of slightly over 416 feet, or just about that of the 2nd floor of Town Hall. And while 416 feet is by no means K2, it does qualify as the 3rd highest point in town. Elevation aside, it is Kissacook's small-town charm and visible history that makes it worth the hike.

The best way to access the trail is by parking at the Norman E. Day School and locating the trail-head about 150 yards to the right of the bluebird boxes along the scrub brush. Signs were installed at both ends of the trail in the spring of 1999. The trail is wide and easy to follow once it is located.

There are many interesting sites along the trail as one ascends the hill. Of particular note are the old quarry sites that lie right beside the trail. Be advised that these quarries are of the "Mom & Pop" variety rather than the H.E. Fletcher Granite Co. breed and it is totally possible to walk right past and not notice them unless you are on the look-out. In studying them, one has to wonder if the harvesting of the granite was some sort of cottage industry or simply the means of gaining the necessary stock for a set of steps or a sturdy hearth. Whatever the reason for their existence, one cannot help thinking of the old Yankees that split these stones so long ago.

At the top of the hill is an outdoor classroom consisting of several benches set in a huge stand of white birch trees. The original wooden benches here have now been rebuilt as granite benches, to the astonishment of some winded hikers. At this point, a hiker may reflect with admiration on the energy and organization of the Boy Scouts who built these. This is a great spot for lunch or simply a quiet rest.

Having reached the summit, the trail runs fairly level to the south for a distance before turning east and back down the hill. In this area another trail leads off to the right (west) and extends down the other side of Kissacook Hill to Orchard Street in Forge Village, which may be explored at your leisure. Following the main trail will take you in short order to a large water tower where the trail can be picked-up again between two small boulders near the tank and east of it's access road. From here the going is a bit steep and some caution is advised especially if hiking with small children. The trail winds it's way down the hill and ends in the front parking lot of the Day School.

In total, the walk is slightly under a mile long and well worth the minimal effort required. Wildflowers grow along the entire length of the trail and there is a fair amount

of birdlife to be seen including an occasional hawk. And, as the White Birch Trail's name implies, this short hike would be a spectacular sight in the autumn.

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John Gagnon Nature Trail

- 1 Poplar Tree & Bitter Sweet
- 2 Gray Birch Tree
- 3 Apple Tree
- 4 Eastern Red Cedar Tree
- 5 Eastern White Pine Tree
- 6 Juniper
- 7 Closed Gentian & Columbine
- 8 Christmas Fern
- 9 Quarrying
- 10 Quarry Tailing
- 11 White Birch Tree
- 12 Lady Slipper
- 13 Partridge Berry
- 14 Black Oak Tree
- 15 Red Oak Tree
- 16 Variegated Pipsissewa
- 17 Sassafras Tree
- 18 Witch Hazel
- 19 Grapes
- 20 Rattlesnake Plantain
- 21 Shagbark Hickory
- 22 Red Maple Tree
- 23 Lady Fern

Cider Mill Pond

Cider Mill Pond is in the midst of 39 acres of conservation land, an attractive woodland covered mainly by large white pines. A cider mill was operated here by Dan Sheehan at the turn of the century. The cider mill building was destroyed by fire in 1905, but the stone foundation of well fitted large granite blocks still exists. The most direct trail access is from the parking area on Lowell Road. Another trail leads in from Stony Brook Road, and other woodland trails connect into this area.

The cider mill was powered by water, and for that reason a dam was constructed in Tadmuck Brook, forming the mill pond. Most of the granite structure of the dam can still be seen, but the dam itself was damaged about 10 years ago. Currently the Conservation Commission is taking steps to restore the dam. This is not as easy as it may seem because of wetlands protection laws, which are stronger now than in past years.

Downstream of the Cider Mill Pond, on the west side of Tadmuck Brook, is an old apple orchard. Upstream and uphill from the old mill is a striking deep hole in the bedrock. This has been a topic of discussion and debate for years. It's called the "Indian Grinding Stone" by many, thinking that it was used by the native people in this area, who probably camped regularly on the flat ground downstream where Tadmuck Brook reaches Stony Brook. Others have speculated that this hole was created by flowing water at the time when the glaciers melted. We know that the ice was about a mile deep over Westford, and that when it melted, it tended to form concentrated streams of water containing sand and gravel. Have a look and maybe you will solve this mystery.

The Acker Conservation Land

by Tom Ennis, land Steward

The first parcel of land donated to the Conservation Trust was the Acker property on Stony Brook. This 15 acre parcel is just downstream from the dam under the Depot Street bridge, sandwiched between the railroad bed and Stony Brook. The trailhead is 180 yards in from the Depot Street railroad crossing. A concrete railroad post with the vertically inscribed number "307" is 50 feet before the trailhead, and the trailhead itself is marked with a hiker medallion on an oak tree.

The Acker trail meanders along Stony Brook for approximately six-tenths of a mile. The trail is marked with vertical yellow lines on the occasional tree, but the trail is well worn and the path is fairly well defined. Following a number of ice-storm tree falls, the trail was impassible in a number of spots up until the fall of '98. Combined with its relatively obscure entry point, this trail has not had a great deal of use recently. But anyone who ventures down the Acker trail now will not be disappointed.

There are great viewing spots of Stony Brook along the way, and of the geese, great blue herons, ducks, and beavers that inhabit this virtually untouched waterway. There is a small beaver dam a short distance from the trailhead, which merely slows the water flow and creates a small pond-like basin behind it. A hiker can be startled by the sudden, loud warning splashes the beavers make when they sense danger. Near the midpoint, the trail passes through a cathedral of white pines, where sunlight never reaches the ground so there is no undergrowth. It is a peaceful, shady spot that is in stark contrast with the rest of the woodland.

About four-fifths of the way along the trail there is a remarkable reminder of the inexhaustible energy of the beaver. Several huge poplar trees have been felled by beavers. Some have been caught up in nearby trees and are suspended diagonally, miscalculations on the part of the engineers of the animal world. The bark of the poplar is a favorite meal of the beaver, evidenced by a number of the fallen trees scraped clean of their bark.

Through the very generous permission of the Dean family, the Westford Conservation Trust has been given access across the Dean parcel that abuts the Acker land. This allows for some terrific scenery. A large beaver lodge has been built along the shore of the brook in the middle of this parcel. This provides a wonderful opportunity for close inspection of the complex construction techniques that beavers use to meld sticks and mud together to create an impenetrable fortress. A short distance away is yet another dam with a cascading waterfall. The soothing sounds of the falling water combined with the scenic surroundings make this spot a tranquil oasis far from the madding crowd.

Recently benches and a bridge have been added along the way. The trail now extends beyond the Dean parcel into the DeSilva land. Altogether this land is clearly a bright jewel in the crown of Westford's preserved woodland and open spaces. It provides an opportunity to experience nature and its woodland wildlife unencumbered by man, and without having to leave town.

Frances Hill Trails

Marian and Bill Harman

The old deed mentions Orchard Pasture, Rowdle Towdle, Gideon Pasture, and Spaulding Pasture, but there are no pastures here now. The land is completely wooded, mainly with oak, maple, ash, and white pine. When we first walked into this woods, in 1973, it was difficult to walk at all because of dense underbrush. Conditions have change a lot in 29 years. Trees are bigger, the understory is less dense, and trails criss-cross the land.

This woodland, on the Westford-Chelmsford town line between Lowell Road and Hunt Road, is open to the public for trail uses. Trail entrances are marked on Lowell Rd., Hunt Rd. (at the town line), and Chamberlin Rd. (at the intersection with Frances Hill Rd.). The northern part, 18 acres, was a gift of the Lambert family to the Westford Conservation Trust, in order that the land would be preserved in a natural condition and be open for the enjoyment of the people of Westford. The southern part is also conservation land, although it is privately owned (Harmans). It is protected by a Conservation Restriction and a trail easement.

In the northern part, a Red-tailed Hawk family is raised here every spring, and Red and Grey Fox, Opossums, Skunks, White-tailed deer, and Coyote are seen here regularly. Many birds, including Wood Thrush and Great Crested Flycatcher, are also summer residents. Wildflowers such as Round-leaf Pyrola, False Solomon Seal, and Polygala bloom along the trails. Very large Red and Black Oaks dominate one section of the forest.

Proceeding uphill to the south, the land gradually rises toward the top of Frances Hill. After crossing over a stone wall, the trail pass near a wet area, which features Hemlock, Jack-in-the-pulpit and other wetland plants. Nearby is a forest clearing, which is home to completely different plants and animals. This is mowed once a year, and has evolved into an interesting wildlife area. In the clearing is a small pool which becomes completely dry in late summer. Spice bush is abundant in this part of the forest. The leaves of this bush have a delightful aroma most of the year. Leaves, twigs, and berries can all be used to make Spice Bush tea.

As the trail winds uphill toward Hunt Rd., the land becomes drier, and White Pine and Oak dominate the canopy. Wildflowers such as Rattlesnake Plantain, Pink Ladies Slipper, and Columbine can be seen here. A Red-bellied Woodpecker family has used an old Ash tree for its nest, and a Broad-winged Hawk is often heard. Migratory Warblers move through here in spring and fall.

Poison ivy is abundant in some areas of these trails, and in the spring, some areas are quite wet. So it's best to wear long pants, socks, and boots.

Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary

Near Westford Common is a relatively new conservation area, which rises from Hildreth Street up to the top of Prospect Hill. This hill is the highest point in Northern Middlesex County. The "Prospect Hill Wildlife Sanctuary" was donated by Priscilla Elliott to the Westford Conservation Trust in 1999. It consists of 8 acres of woodland and an adjoining cornfield. Many wildflowers bloom here in the spring, along with numerous ferns. There are deep-forest birds, including Wood Thrush and Blue-winged Warbler. This interesting land is described by John Hanson Mitchell in his book Walking to Walden.

If you drive to it, you can park off Hildreth Street, on Wright Lane. Park near the small traffic island so others can pass. A green gate indicates the trail entrance. Walking through the gate and going to the left, you will be following an old cart path marked with yellow blazes. The path crosses a small brook on an earthen bridge. This part of the forest is darkly shaded by Norway Spruce, all the same age. These trees were planted soon after the 1938 hurricane.

A huge Shagbark Hickory stands off the trail to your left. This is in fact the largest and champion Shagbark Hickory in Massachusetts! Continuing on the cart path, the trail rises and curves to the right. Because of the steepness, this trail would not be appropriate for a stroller. As the trail rises, it parallels an old stone wall on the left of the trail. This marks the boundary with town owned land administered by the Water Department.

After reaching the uppermost point on the cart path, there is a smaller trail leading more directly down the hill by a different route, which is very steep. Eagle Scout Barrett Bilotta organized a trail improvement project in this area recently. Thanks to him and his helpers, the trail leading down the steep slope is much easier to walk. Reaching the bottom, you will be near the cornfield, and walking among some interesting old stone structures. The trail returns to the green gate. The entire loop can be hiked in less than a half hour, but some people like to relax and focus on the beautiful surroundings, remarkably located so near the center of Town.

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Trails in the Nashoba Brook Watershed

Marian Harman, May 2006

A wonderful area to explore is the Town's Richard Emmet Conservation Land, Mass. Audubon's Nashoba Brook Sanctuary, and the Westford Conservation Trust's Wilson Land. Together they comprise over 500 acres of protected open space in the southern part of Westford, and you can take many walks there, each time in a new area.

The 336-acre Town-owned Richard Emmet Land, which is administered by the Westford Conservation Commission, is the largest piece. It is named in honor of Richard Emmet, Westford resident, who literally "wrote the book" on this area. Dick is the author of Westford Bird Notes, 1951-2002 (available at the J.V. Fletcher library). In this book, Dick provides detailed descriptions of the 170 bird species which he has encountered in this area. An historical analysis of species abundance and habitat preferences gives a rare glimpse into what has been happening with Westford's bird populations during this fifty year period. Dick has documented that many migrant species have declined, while many resident species seemed to have remained relatively constant. Dick was the first person to discover the rare Goshawk family which has nested here for the past several years. The trails on this land are not marked, and may be confusing, so you may want to take along this map for reference. Much of this land was graveled and is in the process of recovering to forest. It features an approximately twenty-acre dug pond, which is stocked with bass, and is used for fishing by both birds and humans. One

cannot drive into the pond, and swimming is not allowed there. In spring, wildflowers which thrive in sandy soil, such as rabbits foot clover, and wild indigo abound. Vine Brook and Nashoba Brook cross this land. In the brooks' associated wetlands, plants such as marsh marigold can be seen.

The Nashoba Brook Sanctuary, owned by Mass. Audubon, abuts the Richard Emmet Land, and is well connected by trails. This 144-acre piece of land is more heavily forested, and includes a beautiful hay field on Texas Rd., where bluebirds and tree swallows can be seen at their nest boxes. Nonset Brook and its associated wetlands crosses this land. The Wilson Land, 30 acres owned by the Westford Conservation Trust, abuts the Audubon Land, and is also connected to the Town land by trails. This is beautiful, heavily forested high land. Each habitat area boasts its own plants, mammals and birds. Mammals seen in the area include foxes, coyotes, fisher, and otter.

There are three parking areas to access this land. The easiest way to start is to park at the end of Trailside Way, which is off Powers Rd. across from the Ideal Concrete Block Co. Drive to the end of Trailside, half way around the cul-de-sac at the end, and then onto a short dirt road which leads to a parking area and kiosk. Take the trail into the woods which will lead you to Nashoba (Kennedy) pond. You can circle the pond and back again for a fairly short walk of about two miles. The trail is fairly level, but rough and rocky. You will see other trails off of this one which you can explore, and you will also notice the Audubon land trails taking off from the northern side of the pond. Another place to park is in the Mass. Audubon parking area on Concord Rd., across from Banbury Drive. From here, you can access one section of the Mass. Audubon land, for a short loop walk to the west (about one mile), to Nashoba Brook and back. Or, you can continue straight ahead which will bring you to the parking area off of Trailside Way, and a trail into the Trust's Wilson Land. The Trust's Wilson Land can also be accessed by a trailhead on Preservation Way. The third parking area is near the end of Texas Rd., on the right. From here you can access the other part of the Mass. Audubon land, crossing Nonset Brook on long bog bridges, built by Eagle Scouts, Ryan Dromgoole and Anthony Capriccio. Happy Trails!

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